OUR ALL-SUFFICIENT RESOURCES IN CHRIST

2 Peter 1:3-4

By

Steven J. Cole

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Many years ago, Crowfoot, the chief of the Blackfoot confederacy in southern Alberta, Canada, gave the Canadian Pacific Railroad permission to cross the Blackfoot land from Medicine Hat to Calgary. In return, the railroad gave Crowfoot a lifetime pass to ride on the railway. He put it in a leather case and wore it around his neck for the rest of his life. But there is no evidence that he ever used it to travel anywhere on the Canadian Pacific trains.

We may chuckle at the chief’s neglecting to use his pass, but many Christians are just like him in not availing themselves of the unlimited promises of God. They may put them on a plaque on the wall, but practically they never actually use God’s promises in their daily lives. But in our text, Peter wants us to know that…

God has granted to us everything we need for life and godliness through knowing Christ and trusting in His all-sufficient promises.

That statement sounds pretty good. You wouldn’t think that among Bible-believing Christians it would be controversial in any way. But, sad to say, it is. Back in 1991, John MacArthur published Our Sufficiency in Christ [Word Publishing]. In the preface, he anticipated that the book would be controversial due to a widespread lack of confidence in Christ’s sufficiency in the contemporary church. He wrote (p. 19), “Too many Christians have tacitly acquiesced to the notion that our riches in Christ, including Scripture, prayer, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and all the other spiritual resources we find in Christ simply are not adequate to meet people’s real needs.”

He goes on to lament that many evangelical churches and seminaries put more of an emphasis on psychotherapy than on God’s Word. To support his point, he says, listen to any call-in talk show on Christian radio or visit a Christian bookstore and note the proliferation of so-called “Christian” recovery books. The counsel dispensed through these means may have a few biblical references
scattered throughout, but it doesn’t encourage Christians to avail themselves of their riches in Christ. MacArthur writes (p. 31),

“Christian psychologists” have become the new champions of church counseling. They are now heralded as the true healers of the human heart. Pastors and lay people are made to feel ill-equipped to counsel unless they have formal training in psychological techniques.

The clear message is that simply pointing Christians to their spiritual sufficiency in Christ is inane and maybe even dangerous. But on the contrary, it is inane and dangerous to believe that any problem is beyond the scope of Scripture or unmet by our spiritual riches in Christ.

I can affirm MacArthur’s words from my own ministry experience. Almost always when I have spoken on this subject, I have received intense criticism. I have been accused of not caring about hurting people. I have been told that my message about the all-sufficiency of Christ is dangerous, because it will discourage hurting people from going for the counseling that they desperately need. They might even commit suicide because rather than referring these hurting people to a trained therapist, I have encouraged them to trust in Christ. I have been told that I don’t understand the deep-seated problems that some people are wrestling with. So when I say that Christ is sufficient, I am giving pat, simplistic advice to complicated problems.

To clarify, I am not against counseling. I encourage mature, godly Christians to offer biblical counsel to less mature believers who are hurting. And I am not against the proper use of medication in some situations. My problem is not with giving counsel, but with giving unbiblical counsel. On more than one occasion, people who have come to talk to me about their problems have volunteered that they went to a professional “Christian” counselor in town, but he didn’t help them. I asked, “Did he pray with you?” No. “Did he open God’s Word and show you how to apply it to your situation?” No. “Well, did he at least talk about God’s Word, encouraging you to read it and explaining how it could help you?” No. “Well, then, you did not receive Christian counsel!”
Also, when people accuse me (or anyone who holds to the all-sufficiency of Christ) of being uncaring and of keeping people from getting the help they really need, they are assuming that Christ can’t really help hurting people! The implication is, people’s problems are too-deep seated and entrenched for the Bible to do any good. The Bible may be nice to refer to once in a while for an uplifting thought, but when you’re struggling with deep problems, you need the expertise of a trained therapist! And so, they set aside as superficial and impractical the inspired words of our text.

But if the words of Scripture mean anything, they mean that God has granted to us everything we need for life and godliness through knowing Christ and trusting in His all-sufficient promises. A younger believer may not be aware of God’s promises and so he needs a godly counselor to help him understand and apply those promises to his situation. But he doesn’t need anything in addition to what God has provided for us in Christ. It’s all there; we just have to understand what we have and how to apply it.

It’s like when an international student comes here and does not understand our banking system. He needs someone to explain the system and to go to the bank with him for a few times, until he knows how to set up and then use his account. Well, we have an inexhaustible account in Christ! Either it is sufficient for our every need or the Bible is untrue. It is the job of more mature Christians to help newer Christians know how to use the Bank of Heaven. So I pray that rather than be controversial, this message will help you understand and use the precious and magnificent promises that are yours if you are in Christ. Our text makes two main points:

1. **God provides His all-sufficient resources as a gift through knowing Christ (1:3).**

The flow of thought here is not easy, but let me try to explain it (Thomas Schreiner provides help in The American Commentary, 1, 2 Peter, Jude [Broadman], p. 290). In verse 2, Peter states his desire that grace and peace would be multiplied to us in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Verse 3 then explains the resources that bring multiplied grace and peace. God has granted these resources to us through knowing Christ, whom Peter further describes as the one “who called us by His own glory and excellence.” (The New KJV follows a textual variant that omits one Greek let-
ter, changing “His own” into “through” or “by.”) “By these” (v. 4) refers back to Christ’s glory and excellence. By or through these qualities, He has granted to us His precious and magnificent (or “very great”) promises so that by them, we become partakers of the divine nature, thus escaping the corruption that is in the world by lust. There are three points to explore in verse 3:

A. God grants us everything pertaining to life and godliness.

I understand “life” to refer to the eternal life that we receive at the moment we trust in Christ (John 3:16). The Bible teaches that all of us are naturally dead in our sins, under God’s wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). Dead men do not need a moral code to live by. They don’t need some helpful hints for happy living. They need life! God imparts new life—eternal life—as a free gift through Jesus Christ, whose sacrificial death paid the penalty for all who believe in Him.

If you do not possess eternal life in Jesus Christ, nothing else I say in this message matters to you. Christianity is, as Henry Scougal put it in the late 1600’s, The Life of God in the Soul of Man. The apostle John put it (1 John 5:11-12), “And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” So make sure that you have received eternal life as God’s gift through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ!

But this eternal life is not something that pertains only to heaven, but is useless now. Rather, it begins at the point of trusting in Christ as Savior and it continues throughout eternity. Thus eternal life impacts in a most practical way how we live daily life here and now. Peter is asserting that God has granted to us everything that we need to deal with life’s problems, whether major or minor. His Word tells us how to deal with suffering and how to face death (whether our own or that of a loved one). It tells us how to work through relational difficulties. It tells us how to manage our finances. It gives us instruction on how to handle our emotions. It tells us how to gain wisdom for every situation in life.

We would be here all day if I listed all the verses that claim the sufficiency of God’s provision for us in Christ, but consider just a few. In 1 Corinthians 1:4-5, Paul told that problem-plagued church, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God
which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge.” In verse 30 of the same chapter he states, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” In 2 Corinthians 9:8, he wrote to the same congregation, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” Later (2 Cor. 12:9), he reported how in his intense trial, the Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul says that God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” In Ephesians 3:8, he mentions “the unfathomable riches of Christ.” He goes on in that chapter (3:19) to pray that we “will know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that [we] may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” In Colossians 2:10, he says that we have been made complete in Christ. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, he says that Scripture makes us adequate for every good work.

For thousands of years the Bible has been adequate to equip the saints to go through unspeakable tragedy, to face persecution and even martyrdom. Our problem today is not that the Bible is incapable of dealing with our problems, but rather that we do not know the vast resources that God has put there for us. As John MacArthur wrote (Our Sufficiency in Christ, p. 27), “To seek something more [than what we have been given in Christ] is like frantically knocking on a door, seeking what is inside, not realizing you hold the key in your pocket.”

Peter not only says that God has given us everything pertaining to life, but also to godliness. Godliness is inextricably bound up with eternal life. If you possess eternal life in Christ, you will be growing in godliness, or Christlikeness. While we will never attain perfection in this life, we should see evident growth in obedience to God’s Word, as summed up in the two great commandments of love for God and love for one another. Peter goes on in chapter 2 to describe the ungodly behavior of the false teachers, who profess to know Christ, but deny Him by their deeds (Titus 1:16).

But, how does God grant us everything pertaining to life and godliness? Peter shows that...
B. God grants us everything pertaining to life and godliness by His divine power.

In other words, we are not talking about some techniques or principles that you could find in Reader’s Digest or in a popular self-help book. Peter is talking about something that requires divine power. There is some ambiguity as to whether “His” refers to God the Father or to Jesus Christ. John MacArthur (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 2 Peter & Jude [Moody Publishers], p. 26) argues that it refers to the Lord Jesus. If it referred to God, the word divine would be superfluous, since deity is inherent in God’s name. Also, using divine to refer to Jesus’ power emphasizes His deity. In verse 16 Peter again refers to Christ’s power, which Peter had seen.

In verse 3, Christ’s power is primarily the power of imparting new life at the moment of salvation. In Ephesians 1:19, Paul prays that God would enlighten the eyes of his readers’ hearts, so that we would know “what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” He goes on to relate it to God’s mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him above all other powers. This means that conversion is not primarily a human decision that everyone has the ability to choose. Conversion requires God’s resurrection power, calling us from death to life. Just as Jesus cried, “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43) and that dead man came back to life, so He must call us out of death into eternal life. The instant that we are alive spiritually by His power, we also receive everything pertaining to life and godliness. And we receive the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to produce godliness in us.

C. God grants us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the knowledge of Christ, who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Many commentators refer “Him who called us” to the Father, not to Christ, because they say that divine calling is always attributed to God. But, Jesus said (Luke 5:32), “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” So here it may refer to Christ. “His own glory and excellence” refers to the majesty and moral perfection of Christ.

We come to know Christ personally when He effectually calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9; see, also 1
Pet. 1:15; 2:21; 3:9; 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:10). The Bible speaks of a general call of the gospel that goes out to all (John 7:37), but also of an effectual call that always results in salvation (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:26). Christ’s calling us by His own glory and excellence means that we are effectually drawn to Him when He opens our eyes to see His majesty and beauty. All of Jesus’ earthly life displayed His glory and moral excellence, so that John could say (John 1:14), “And we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Peter refers to seeing Christ’s glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

But the cross is the supreme demonstration of the glory and moral excellence of Jesus Christ (John 12:27-28; 13:31-32; 17:4-5). It was there, as the sinless Son of God bore our shame, that the sky was darkened, the earth quaked, and the tombs were opened so that the dead were raised. It was there that the Father’s perfect love and justice met. It is at the cross that we see the glory and virtue of Christ, “who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet. 2:22-23).

We come to know Christ when He opens our eyes to see His glory and excellence at the cross. At that point, we begin a lifelong quest to know Him more deeply (Phil. 3:8-10). That growing, personal knowledge of Christ as our all in all supplies us with all that we need for life and godliness.

But we still must look at the all-sufficient resources of verse 4:

2. God’s all-sufficient resources are contained in His precious and magnificent promises (1:4).

As I said, “by these” refers back to Christ’s glory and moral excellence,” especially as seen at the cross. When we come to salvation by seeing the glory and moral perfection of Christ who died for us, we inherit all of His precious and very great promises. These promises especially relate to salvation—things like forgiveness of sins, perfect acceptance before God, a personal relationship with God through Christ, where we experience His abundant love, the certain hope of eternity in heaven, and much more. But they also include all of the promises of the Bible that relate practically to life
and godliness—victory over sin, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and strength to deal with trials, and peace that passes understanding. As Paul says (2 Cor. 1:20), “For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes.”

In verse 4, Peter mentions two benefits of God’s all-sufficient promises, one positive and one negative:

A. God’s precious and magnificent promises cause us to become partakers of the divine nature.

Peter says, “by them [God’s promises] you may become partakers of the divine nature.” He is referring not only to a future possibility, but also to a present reality. When God calls us to salvation, He imparts to us His life, eternal life (Col. 3:3; 1 John 5:11). We are born again, so that we become children of God (John 1:12-13; 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:23). Part of the gift of eternal life includes the indwelling Holy Spirit, who works over time to produce holiness in us (1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 5:16).

So when Peter says that we are partakers of the divine nature, he does not mean that we become “little gods,” as some false teachers assert. There is always an inherent difference between the eternal Creator and His finite creation. Rather, Peter means that we share in the very life of God, so that His moral excellence progressively becomes ours. Finally, when we see Jesus, we will be like Him, apart from all sin. In the meanwhile, we are to be growing in holiness (1 John 3:2-3). In verse 4 Peter states what God has done for us, imparting His very life to us so that we may become holy. In verses 5-7, he spells out our responsibility to grow in godliness.

B. God’s precious and magnificent promises enable us to escape the corruption that is in the world by lust.

At the moment that we are born again, so that God’s life dwells in us, we are set apart from this evil world unto God. We now belong to Him. We share in His nature, which includes moral excellence. Due to sin, the world is morally like rotting garbage. People in the world live for their lusts, whether it be sex or greed or self-centered pride. But God’s precious and great promises deliver us from that corruption (Col. 1:13).

Does Peter mean that believers in this life are completely free from the corrupting lusts that characterize the world? No, because
in 1 Peter 1:14-15 he exhorts us, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.” In 1 Peter 2:11 he adds, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” The difference is, before we were saved, we didn’t fight against these fleshly lusts. In fact, we loved them and wallowed in them. But now, we hate them and fight against them.

So it’s an “already, but not yet” sort of thing. Already, we have been set apart from the world unto God through His life within us. When Jesus returns, we will be totally free from sin. In the meanwhile, we must fight against the lusts that wage war against our souls. It’s a constant battle, but one that we can win because we are partakers of the divine nature through the precious and magnificent promises of the gospel. God’s power that imparted new life to us is available to give us victory over the lusts of the flesh.

**Conclusion**

Peter’s point in our text is that God has graciously given us everything that we need for life and godliness through knowing Christ and through trusting in His wonderful promises. If you are defeated by sin, either you do not understand the all-sufficient resources that God has freely given to you, or worst case, you do not have His new life dwelling in you. His promises give you unlimited resources in Christ. Don’t be like Chief Crowfoot and put them around your neck, but never use them! Grow in your knowledge of Christ and His promises and He will satisfy your soul!

**Application Questions**

1. We use modern medicine for illnesses. Why not use psychology for emotional or mental illnesses?
2. Are we pushing the text too far to say that God’s resources in Christ are sufficient for all of life and godliness? Discuss.
3. Can you think of one problem for which psychology has an answer that the Bible lacks? What implications does this have?